

# **Barnet Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2019-2024**

## **Consultation Report**

March 2019

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## **1. Aims of the consultation**

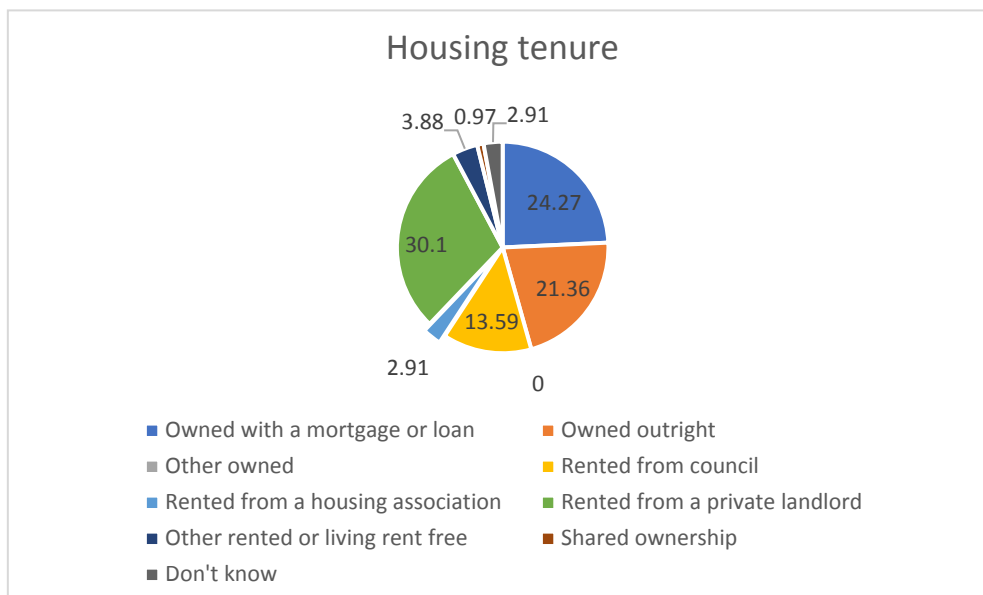
- 1.1 Under the Homelessness Act 2002, all local authorities have to carry out a review of homelessness every five years.
- 1.2 Barnet Council has put forward its first Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy, which had previously been part of its Housing Strategy.
- 1.3 The main themes of the strategy are:
  1. Preventing homelessness
  2. Reducing the number of households in temporary accommodation and securing sufficient accommodation for those who are at risk or homeless
  3. Establishing effective partnerships, working arrangements and support to those who are or used to be homeless, to improve their resilience and reduce the risk of them becoming homeless again
  4. Supporting rough sleepers to address their housing and other needs
- 1.4 As part of this process, a consultation period of three months was held to seek residents' feedback on the strategy document.

## 2. Methodology

- 2.1 The questionnaires asked respondents how much they agreed with different priorities of the strategy, involving both the overarching 5 themes as well as individual priorities within those themes.
- 2.2 There were also open-ended, free text boxes which allowed respondents to add in what they thought was missing from the strategy as a whole and the individual themes within it.
- 2.3 The Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy was consulted on over a three-month period from 5<sup>th</sup> November 2018 to 11<sup>th</sup> February 2019.
- 2.4 166 responses were received on Engage Barnet in that time. Respondents were able to read the strategy online through Engage Barnet, while paper copies were available on request.
- 2.5 Service users of Barnet's homelessness service were consulted at Barnet House Customer Contact Centre. 44 responses were collected this way during the consultation period, with paper copies handed out and uploaded onto Engage Barnet, allowing for good representation of some of the key stakeholders that the strategy will impact.
- 2.6 Alongside the Housing Strategy, which was consulted on over the same period, the strategy consultation was advertised on social media – primarily Twitter and Facebook. It was also advertised on Barnet's website, as well as in Barnet Homes' resident magazine *atHome*, which goes to 15,000 homes.
- 2.7 The strategy was also presented to various internal boards, who gave formal responses to the strategy on behalf of the groups or interests they represent. Other formal responses were also received from key partners of the council.

### 3. Demographics of respondents

3.1 The majority of respondents were doing so as a Barnet resident (83.1%), while others responded as a Barnet business (1.3%), a voluntary or community organisation (4.4%) or a public-sector organisation (3.8%). 5.6% of respondents were non-residents or out of borough.



3.2 The council is also required by the Equality Act 2010 to have due regard to ensuring people are treated fairly and particularly in relation to those with protected characteristics- age, disability, ethnicity, gender, gender reassignment, marriage/civil partnership, pregnancy, maternity, religion/belief and sexual orientation.

3.3 Age was well balanced amongst respondents, with the largest group 35 to 44-year olds (26.2% of respondents). However younger people aged 18 to 24 were slightly underrepresented at 4.7% and 16 to 17-year olds even more so at 0.9%.

3.4 The gender of respondents was higher amongst females (56.1%) than males (35.5%).

3.5 Additionally, the majority of respondents were heterosexuals (75.0%) compared to 5.2% identifying as gay, 2.1% as bisexual and 1.0% as lesbian.

3.6 24.8% of respondents identified as having a disability.

3.7 The main ethnicity that responded was White British (46.7%), with strong representation from Black British (5.6%) and Black African (3.7%) groups as well.

3.8 Moreover, the main religious group of respondents was Christian (30.8%), while a lot of respondents selected no religion (36.5%) or Muslim (10.6%).

#### **4. Summary of key findings**

- The mean average support for the priorities of the strategy was 92%.
- The strategy identified these four themes as priorities for homelessness in rough sleeping in Barnet over the next five years, all of which received very strong support from respondents.
- Respondents were asked whether they strongly agreed, tended to agree, tended to disagree, strongly disagreed or didn't know for each priority.
- The most popular priority was preventing homelessness, which 93.8% either tended to agree or strongly agreed on.
- Establishing effective partnerships, working arrangements and support was also popular with 92.5% agreeing, while supporting rough sleepers to address their housing and other needs (91.8%) and reducing the number of households in temporary accommodation (90.4%) also received strong backing.

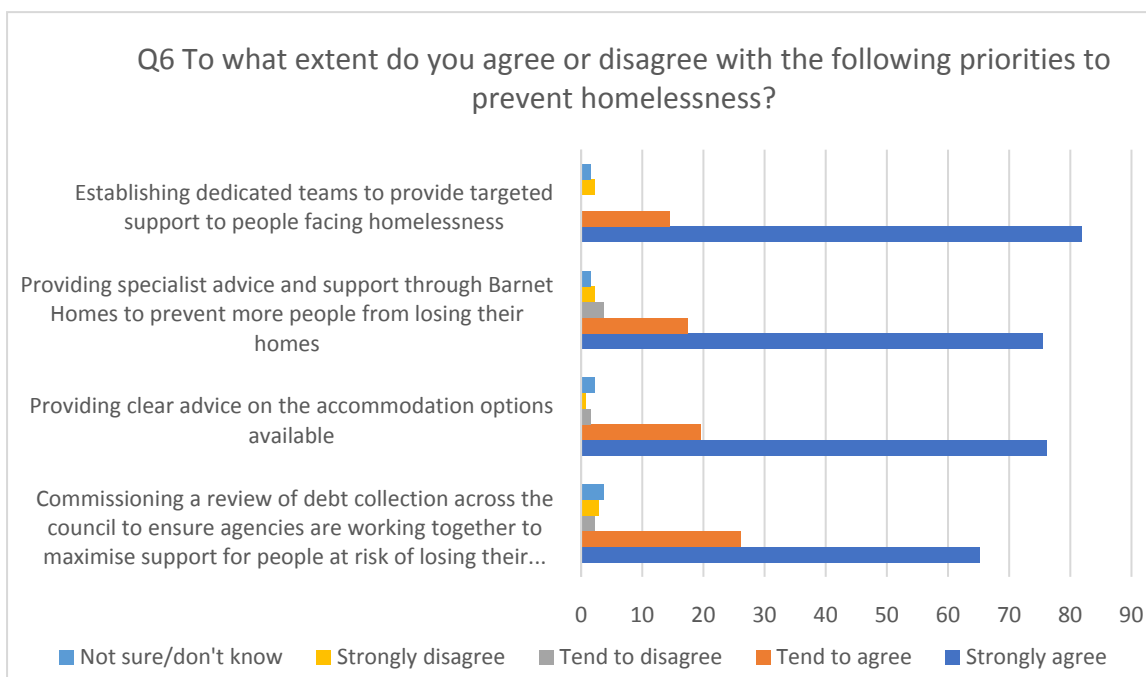
## Free text responses

- At the end of every chapter and for the strategy as a whole, there were free text boxes which allowed respondents to input what they felt was missing from the strategy or any point they felt was particularly important to emphasise.
- 30 respondents chose to give a further response on the strategy as a whole, while 41 had a comment on the overarching themes.
- The word cloud below summarises these, which had the following phrases as the most common responses:
  1. **Affordable** – respondents stressed the need for affordable housing in the borough as a means of preventing homelessness.
  2. **Health needs** – a number of replies expressed concern over the health of rough sleepers, arguing that the council should do more to ensure that these are met.
  3. **Reduce numbers in temporary accommodation** – a recurring theme was a desire to reduce the numbers in temporary accommodation, which respondents felt worked in the short-term but longer-term housing was needed.
  4. **Debt support** – the impact of debt as a cause of homelessness was raised.
  5. **Empty space** – respondents were concerned about the number of empty properties in the borough while there were homeless people, suggesting the council take an active role in re-purposing these spaces to house the homeless.



- Other responses emphasised the importance of the Homelessness Action in Barnet Centre, which provides practical support while people search for accommodation. There was also a reinforcement of the need for addressing health and other social needs, which makes up a chapter of the strategy.
- Some of the replies thought the council could do more in terms of outreach for rough sleepers, while there was also concern about out of borough placement when re-housing rough sleepers.

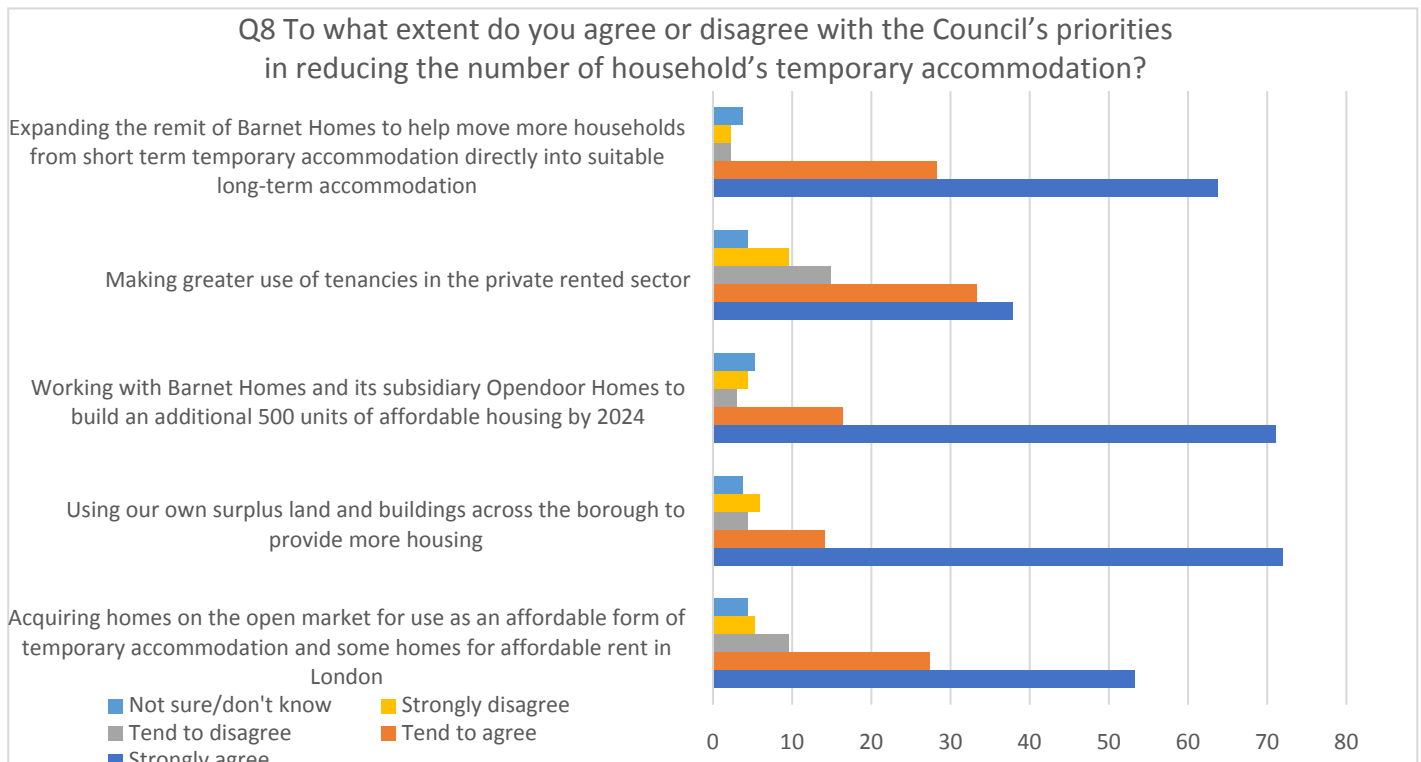
## Preventing homelessness



- The chapter on preventing homelessness received strong support on the overarching priorities section and this was similarly reflected in the more specific policies.
- All four of the priorities had at least 90% either tending to agree or strongly agreeing, with establishing dedicated teams to provide targeted support receiving 96.4% support.
- Free text comments showed concern about private sector tenancies as a cause of homeless and a desire to do more to prevent people becoming homeless from this route.

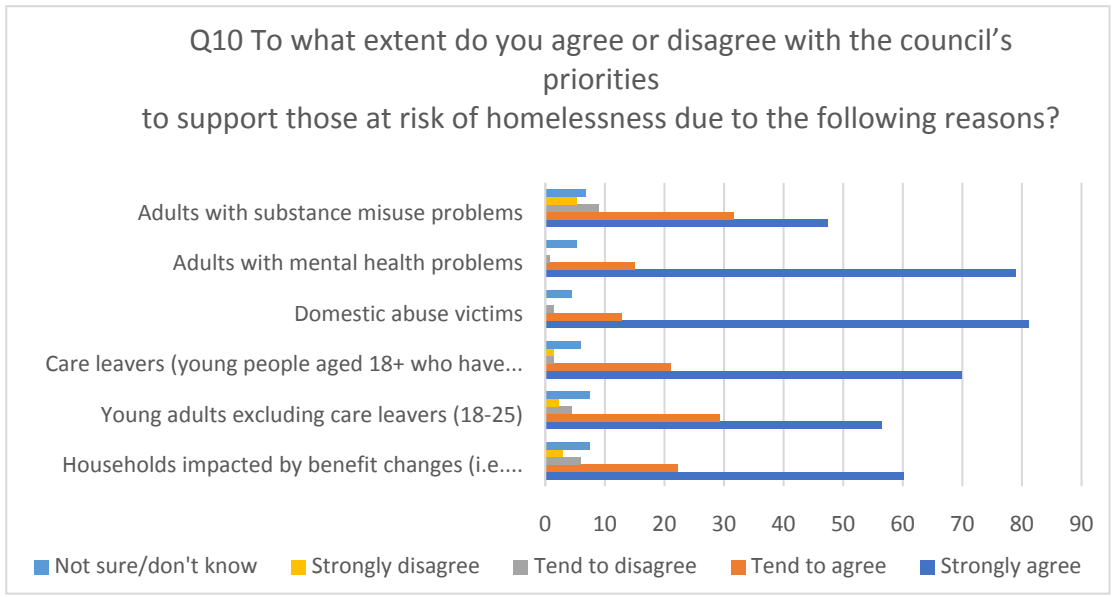


## Reducing the number of households in temporary accommodation and securing sufficient accommodation for those who are at risk or homeless



- Reducing the number of households in temporary accommodation was a well-received priority in the strategy and was also mentioned in the free text boxes, emphasising its importance to residents.
- The individual policies within this chapter were similarly popular for the most part, with expanding the remit of Barnet Homes to move more households into longer-term accommodation receiving 91.9% support.
- Making greater use of tenancies in the private rented sector had 71.1% tending to agree or strongly agreeing.

**Establishing effective partnerships, working arrangements and support to those who are or used to be homeless, to improve their resilience and reduce the risk of them becoming homeless again**

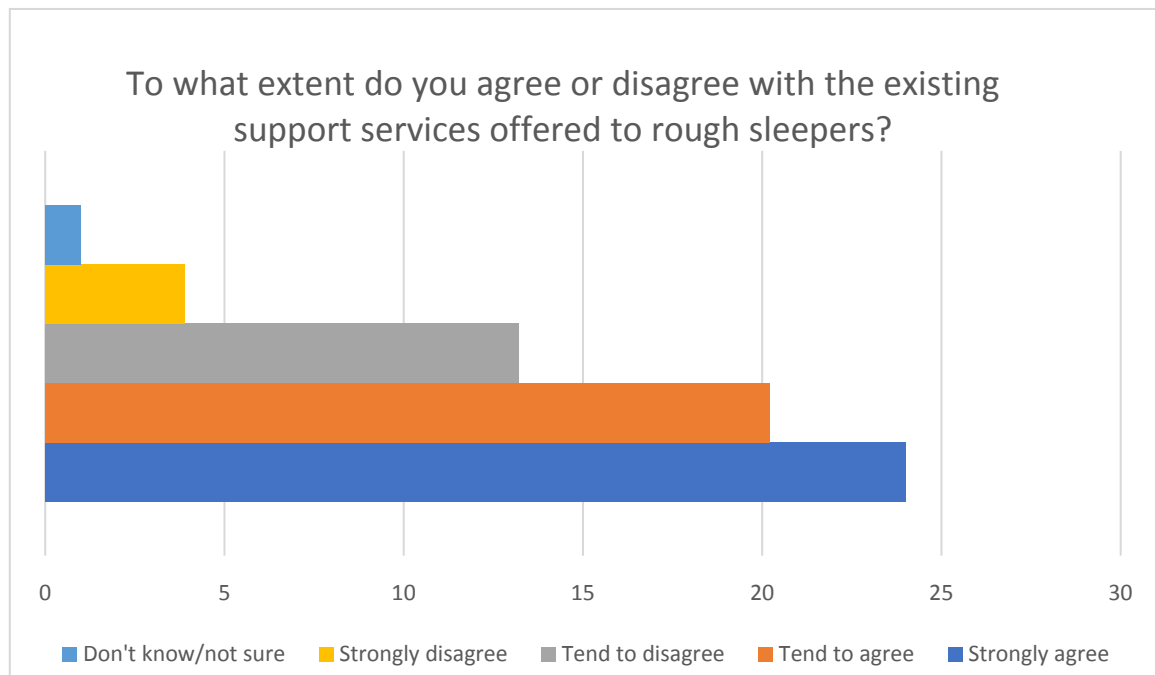


- The questions on this chapter demonstrated some possible areas for improvement for the council that will feed back into the strategy. When asked if they agreed or disagreed that the council works well with different partner organisations, only 50.8% either tended to agree or strongly agreed.
- While only 26.5% disagreed in either form, it demonstrates why this needs to be a priority of the strategy moving forward.
- There was, however, strong support for the council's priorities relating to the vulnerable groups listed in the table above.



**Supporting rough sleepers to address their housing and other needs**

- This chapter of the strategy also raised areas for improvement, as just 44.2% agreed with the existing support services offered to rough sleepers. Again, there was strong support for the individual priorities of the chapter, with all five priorities receiving at least 82% agreeing.
- There were also a number of free text responses (30) which had a range of suggestions, including extending support services to ensure that rough sleepers can receive support on any day or at any time.



## 5. Formal responses

- 5.1 Several formal responses were received as part of the consultation from a range of partners, both within and outside of the council. These were generally positive but did also give areas of guidance and possible additions to the strategy.
- 5.2 Homelessness Action in Barnet, a key partner in offering support and assistance to rough sleepers while looking for accommodation, were keen to emphasise their partnership with the council and the work they carry out in supporting homeless clients in the borough.
- 5.3 A number of internal boards were presented to and gave feedback, including the Health and Wellbeing Board/the council's Public Health team. They were keen for an additional priority emphasising health and wellbeing, stressing that all rough sleepers should have a full assessment of health needs and be registered with a GP. They were also enthusiastic about closer working in future to stress the importance of the link between homelessness and health.
- 5.4 Barnet Council's Family Services department wanted more mention of corporate parenting and reference to youth homelessness and inter-borough initiatives around it, for example on gangs.

- 5.5 The Barnet Council Safeguarding Adults Board and Children’s Partnership also had a number of recommendations, including strong local leadership in the Homelessness Forum and closer co-operation with social care departments when dealing with those with complex needs.

## 6. Social Media

- 6.1 The consultation was advertised online through social media, which formed a central part of the consultation approach. This allowed for wider engagement and with different demographic groups to those who might traditionally engage through Engage Barnet.

6.2



We want to know your thoughts on:

Our draft Housing Strategy –  
[engage.barnet.gov.uk/draft\\_Housing\\_...](https://engage.barnet.gov.uk/draft_Housing_...)

AND

Our draft Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy –  
[engage.barnet.gov.uk/Housing\\_Homele...](https://engage.barnet.gov.uk/Housing_Homele...)

Please tell us what you think!

Deadline: 4 Feb.

[#barnet](#) [#edgware](#) [#millhill](#) [#hendon](#)  
[#finchley](#) [#colindale](#)

The consultation was advertised through a series of tweets and Facebook posts, as exemplified below. The council has over 16,000 twitter followers.

- 6.3 There were also regular Facebook posts, with 'boosts' used as a form of targeted advertising to ensure more residents saw about the surveys and had an opportunity to respond. One example of this took place on the 30<sup>th</sup> January and reached 6,214 people, leading to 156 'post clicks'.
- 6.4 Comments from social media were also recorded, with 11 recorded comments about the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy.
- 6.5 Feedback included comments about the lack of social housing as a cause of homelessness, with a number of respondents keen to see more social housing in the borough.

## **7. Barnet House Customer Contact Centre**

- 7.1 As part of the consultation, paper copies of the surveys were handed out at the Barnet House Customer Contact Centre, the place where residents go to make a homelessness claim or have a meeting about their housing options.
- 7.2 This allowed for more service users to give their feedback and these surveys were then uploaded onto Engage Barnet.
- 7.3 In total, there were 44 surveys filled out this way over the consultation period.
- 7.4 Many of these respondents used their own experiences to inform their views on the strategy, which gives a new perspective to the consultation period.

## **8. Conclusion**

- 8.1 The consultation generally received very positive responses, with the main priorities well received by the respondents.
- 8.2 All four of the main priorities received at least 90% support, which represents an extremely positive reaction.
- 8.3 The specific policies of each theme were also well supported, which suggests the council is correct in its approach to addressing the identified issues.
- 8.4 There were areas for improvement for the council from the surveys, primarily around how well it works with partner organisations and the level of support it offers to rough sleepers is.
- 8.5 Both of these questions received lower rates of agreement, with quite a large share unsure.
- 8.6 The suggestions from the surveys, as well as the ideas from internal boards and formal responses, will feed back into the final strategy document.
- 8.7 We thank all those who took the time to respond to our surveys, both online and at the Barnet House Customer Contact Centre, as well as those who submitted formal responses.